

American

NEWS & VIEWS

A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy

June 10, 2011

TNC Is Legitimate Representative of Libyan People, Secretary Clinton Says	1
U.S. Sanctions Iranian Security Forces for Rights Violations	1
An American City Uses YouTube to Show Its Pride	2
Egyptian-American Group Empowers People in U.S., Egypt	2
Hope for Vaccine Grows as World Reaffirms AIDS Commitment.....	3

TNC Is Legitimate Representative of Libyan People, Secretary Clinton Says

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says the United States recognizes Libya's Transitional National Council (TNC) as "the legitimate interlocutor for the Libyan people," and is offering its support to the group to help ensure "an inclusive process" when Libya transitions from Muammar Qadhafi's regime.

Speaking in Abu Dhabi June 9, Clinton said the TNC "is the institution through which we are engaging the Libyan people alongside our work with civil society," and that the United States wants to see "Libyans coming together to plan their own future and a permanent inclusive constitutional system that will protect the rights of all Libyans."

The secretary's remarks came after meetings of the Libya Contact Group, a coalition of Arab and non-Arab representatives that is leading international efforts to support the political transition in Libya. She also met with TNC Executive Bureau Chairman Mahmoud Jibril.

Clinton told reporters there have been "numerous and continuing discussions" between U.S. officials and "people close to Qadhafi," and the topics include "the potential for a transition," but she said "there is not any clear way forward yet."

She announced earlier in the day that the United States is giving \$26.5 million in new humanitarian assistance for people who have been affected by the conflict between Qadhafi's security forces and the Libyan people. The new funding brings the total amount of U.S. humanitarian assistance to nearly \$81 million.

Clinton also welcomed nearly \$300 million in TNC financial assistance from Kuwait and Qatar through a newly established temporary financial mechanism, and said all of the contact group members are "working to put the TNC on firmer financial footing."

She said the Obama administration is continuing to provide nonlethal assistance to the TNC and the United States is allowing American companies to buy oil from the council. President Obama has asked the U.S. Congress to pass legislation that will authorize the use of Libyan assets that were frozen under U.S. sanctions.

Clinton said a group of U.S. senators have agreed on a framework that would allow the frozen assets to be used for humanitarian aid in Libya.

U.S. officials "are doing all we can" to help the TNC

better organize itself and build governing institutions. Clinton said there have been "very open conversations" between them and TNC representatives. "They know and we know there's a long road ahead," she said.

The Obama administration and others in the contact group hope to "help them to improve their capacity to serve as the transition leader of Libya."

"What we seek are open, fair, legitimate elections ... that will determine what the makeup of the next government of Libya will be," Clinton said, and the TNC "is in a position to guide and lead that process."

U.S. Sanctions Iranian Security Forces for Rights Violations

By Jeff Baron | Staff Writer

Washington — The United States is marking the second anniversary of the violent repression of Iran's opposition by imposing sanctions on the security forces involved in the crackdown.

The sanctions announced June 9 against Iran's Islamic Republican Guard Corps, the Basij militia, the national police and police commander Ismail Ahmadi Moghadam are the most recent in a series imposed on Iranian officials and organizations for violations of human rights.

"The United States stands with all Iranians who wish for a government that respects their human rights, their dignity and their freedom, and we call on the Iranian government to end its systematic human rights abuses and political hypocrisy," Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said in a statement. "Today's sanctions reflect our commitment to hold accountable those governments and officials that violate human rights and deprive their citizens of the opportunities and future they deserve."

"The bite, if you will, of these sanctions is only one element," State Department deputy spokesman Mark Toner told reporters. "It also sends a clear message that we won't abide by Iran's continued human rights abuses. As I said, we've seen since the June 2009 disputed presidential elections a consistent pattern of abuses going after activists, political parties. And today's efforts, which are part of an exhaustive process, as you know, that the Treasury Department undertakes, are an effort to call international attention to those people."

Under the sanctions, any property the organizations or Moghadam have an interest in is blocked, and American individuals and companies can't transact business with them. Moghadam and members of the Iranian security forces also will be subject to U.S. visa restrictions.

The sanctions are based on an order issued by President

Obama in September 2010 to punish those involved in Iran's human rights abuses since the elections. In a statement, Michael Posner, the assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor, said the new sanctions "demonstrate that law enforcement agencies not only have a responsibility to enforce the law but also [to] live up to universal human rights commitments and Iran's own constitution."

The United Nations, the European Union, the United States and other countries also have sanctioned Iran for violating agreements about its nuclear program. Those sanctions also have hit the Republican Guard Corps and companies it controls, and many top Iranian officials are under visa bans for the European Union as well as the United States.

An American City Uses YouTube to Show Its Pride

By Mark Trainer | Staff Writer

Washington — It can be hard for people who live in American cities hard-hit by the economic downturn to keep their spirits up. It's even harder when a major news magazine names their home one of the country's Top Ten Dying Cities. That's what happened to Grand Rapids, Michigan, when *Newsweek* published its list in January.

No matter what conclusions *Newsweek* was ready to draw from the city's drop in population and steep decline in residents under the age of 18, the people of Grand Rapids knew they had a great city and didn't appreciate being badmouthed on the newsstands of America.

Enter Rob Bliss. Bliss is 22 and has a history of silly stunts in the Grand Rapids area. Some have gone over better than others. In recent years he has organized the launching of 100,000 paper airplanes from downtown buildings, a citywide pillow fight, and an overcrowded zombie march through the downtown area.

Newsweek's slight motivated Bliss and his friend Scott Erickson to conceive an ambitious stunt that would show the world Grand Rapids was alive and well. The duo raised \$40,000 and enlisted thousands of Grand Rapids citizens to film a video showcasing the city and its people.

Don McLean's 1971 hit song "American Pie" provides the soundtrack to "The Grand Rapids Lip Dub," which is fast approaching 3 million views on YouTube.

In the video, Grand Rapidsians parade through their city in an act of mass karaoke. Filmed in one astonishing nine-minute camera shot taken from the back of a John Deere utility vehicle and culminating in the camera ascending in a helicopter to take in an enormous sign that says "Experience Grand Rapids," the undertaking took five tries to get right. Although the video features firefighters,

kayakers, a marching band and even a chainsaw ice sculptor, most of the cast are the ordinary folk of a quintessentially American city turning out to show their pride.

Grand Rapids mayor George Heartwell, who rides in the back of a convertible in the video, told the *Detroit Free Press*, "This is about saying we're proud of this city and we love our city and we have a lot to offer."

Egyptian-American Group Empowers People in U.S., Egypt

By M. Scott Bortot | Staff Writer

Washington — Whether meeting in New York or in Cairo, the Alliance of Egyptian Americans (AEA) has one goal: empowering Egyptians in both the United States and Egypt.

Mahmoud Elshazly, president of the AEA, said that the alliance in recent years has hosted leading Egyptian civil society activists in America.

The group has been very active, especially in the past few years, Elshazly said. "I think we did contribute significantly to recent events in Egypt," he said.

Formed in 2005, the AEA resulted from Egyptian-American community efforts to engage in civil society in America and Egypt. With 2,000 members and chapters in seven states, the alliance helps Egyptians assimilate in America while at the same time encouraging democracy in Egypt.

"We feel that we still need to maintain our special cultural heritage and maintain the connection to Egypt and contribute to developments in Egypt in three areas: democracy, sustainable development and social justice," Elshazly said.

In May 2010, the AEA held a conference in New York on Egypt as a constitutional democracy that featured Egyptian democracy activist and former International Atomic Energy Agency head Mohamed ElBaradei. This was followed in September 2010 by a conference in Washington on Egyptian presidential elections that featured Egyptian opposition leaders.

After meeting with Egyptian political and civil society activists in America, the AEA sent a delegation of 12 members to Cairo in December 2010 to discuss democracy and ways to increase cooperation.

"This was just before the revolution, and I think it was crucial that we give moral support," Elshazly said. "Of course the regime was becoming a little tough on activists, but our presence acted as a catalyst to break the wall of

fear.”

Mokhtar Kamel, communications director of the AEA, said that one of the main challenges facing a nonprofit group like the AEA is financing for its programs. Members contribute most of the AEA’s funds and financial support from outside sources is limited.

Kamel said Egyptians might suspect influence from non-Egyptians over the AEA if members do not fund programs. “Therefore, we have to rely on our internal resources, which mean donations,” he said.

Community relations are another challenge faced by the AEA. As headlines regarding events in Egypt withdraw from the spotlight, the AEA tries to keep Egyptian Americans engaged.

“I think communicating to the potential members is [the biggest challenge],” Elshazly said. “Many times when we have an event that hits the media we get repeated, unsolicited cries of ‘where were you guys all this time? I was looking for something like this.’”

Events in Egypt are a main factor that led to the AEA’s formation, Kamel said. Egyptian parliamentary elections in 2005, marred by irregularities, stirred to action Egyptians living in America.

In the wake of the January 25 revolution, the AEA is examining future courses of action. The AEA plans to hold meetings in the coming months “to evaluate where we are and whether any course correction is needed, what the mission should be going forward after the success of the revolution,” Elshazly said.

Kamel said the revolution inspired Egyptian Americans to form new civil society groups to help Egyptians move forward in a time of change. Even if the exact goals and approaches of these groups differ from those of the AEA, Kamel looks forward to future partnerships.

“If we have different directions, if we have different agendas, fine, but we have to have some common ground and we have to cooperate,” Kamel said.

Hope for Vaccine Grows as World Reaffirms AIDS Commitment

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer

Washington — The U.N. General Assembly (UNGA) has reaffirmed its commitment to addressing the global epidemic of HIV/AIDS at a special session in New York as U.S. officials express optimism about multilateral partnerships against the disease and the prospect of finding an effective vaccine that could stop HIV contagion.

One of the United States’ foremost AIDS physicians, Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), has been contending with the deadly virus for decades, but a recent study gives him hope that medical science now has found the path to development of a vaccine.

“It’s not going to happen next year, or the year after,” Fauci said at a June 9 news conference conducted at press centers in New York and Washington. “But at least now for the first time we are seeing light at the end of the tunnel. We will have a vaccine.”

The trial of a vaccine candidate in Thailand completed in April is what gives Fauci hope. The vaccine candidate being tested produced a 30 percent reduction in infection among the population involved. Fauci said that result isn’t great, but it demonstrates that a vaccine can induce an immune response. The NIAID head says decades of research prior to this hadn’t produced that much of a lead.

“We were completely unclear about the kind of immune response that needed to be induced,” he said. “In fact, we were not sure whether we were even capable of inducing, even at a modest level, an effective vaccine.” The Thailand trial proves reducing HIV infection can be done. Science now must mimic the response of the trial participants to the marginally successful vaccine to develop a vaccine that will spark an immune response in greater numbers.

Until a successful vaccine or cure is found, providing ever greater access to expensive and intensive treatment to those with AIDS is the only way to save lives. The UNGA meeting is celebrating the significant progress made in recent years in the number of people receiving treatment and living productive lives even with HIV infection. The number of people receiving treatment has multiplied 22-fold since 2001, according to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), reaching 6.6 million in low- and middle-income countries. UNAIDS reported those figures in a global report on the status of the disease, AIDS at 30: Nations at the crossroads, which was released days before the U.N. meeting began.

The U.S.-backed President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) supports treatment for about half that number, more than 3.2 million people. Begun in 2003 and renewed in 2008 with a \$48 billion commitment, PEPFAR has also provided access to testing and counseling services for 33 million people with HIV and provided 600,000 mothers with drugs to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV, leading to more than 114,000 infants being born HIV-free.

At the same press conference with Fauci, Ambassador Eric Goosby, U.S. global AIDS coordinator, said the United States is providing support to 80 nations contending with HIV/AIDS. The last five years of activity have unfolded in an emergency mode as many countries took their first steps to cope with the disease. Now, Goosby said, "we are shifting our resource footprint to be sustained."

Strong partnerships with host countries and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria are the way to achieve sustainability, Goosby said. If these partners conduct joint planning for the provision of services to those affected by HIV, "we will be able to identify significant savings ... that will allow us to extend our services further," the AIDS ambassador predicted.

Populations who are already marginalized — intravenous drug users, sex workers and men who have sex with men — are often the most vulnerable to HIV infection and suffer the most desperate circumstances. In many places, the stigmatization of those populations compounds the damage done by the epidemic. The U.N. meeting provides another opportunity to emphasize respect for human rights in developing policies and services for all those infected by the epidemic, Goosby said, and to remind people that discouraging discriminatory practices against HIV/AIDS populations is part of the U.S. diplomatic agenda.

"Our entire diplomatic core, including the ambassadors in every country, hold this as a central piece of the dialogue," Goosby said.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov>)